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PLANS OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION AUTHORITIES CONCERNING REGIONAL MUSEUMS IN THE GENERALGOUVERNEMENT IN THE LIGHT OF ANTON PLÜGEL'S REPORTS

In the countries occupied by Nazi Germany, three variants of the Nazi approach to cultural goods were applied, in line with the Nazi thesis on the superiority of the German culture. In Western Europe, recognizing that it is higher than Eastern, cultural goods were generally not destroyed. However, they were plundered across the board, trying to give this practice the appearance of legitimacy, for example in the case of purchases (Świerczyński 1986: 69). The cultural heritage of the East (the area of the former Soviet Union) was to be annihilated. In the order of Marshal von Reichenau we read: "None of the art history monuments in the East are of the slightest importance" (Świerczyński 1986: 70). The cultural goods left out of the law in these areas were therefore destroyed and robbed on a large scale, both by the ministers and commissioners of the Reich, as well as by the commanders of the German army (Nicholas 1997: 179–194).

On the territory of Poland under the German occupation an indirect solution was in force, namely everything connected with the culture of the West, considered as a manifestation of German influence, was secured and then transported to the museums of the Reich. This was the mission that Kajetan Mühlmann, the Commissioner for the Protection of Works of Art in the Occupied Territories, came to Cracow with. The cultural goods, in turn, which were considered to be Polish, were to be destroyed (Nicholas 1997: 67–68; Świerczyński 1986: 70; Witek 2003: 7–18). As a result of such activities, the balance of losses of movable cultural goods in the period from September 1939 to May 1945 is striking. The Polish state lost: 22 million books,

933 thousand copies and 100 thousand document files, 1.815 million volumes, 750 thousand volumes and 1.800 million copies of records, 13,652 rare books, 31,856 incunables, 69,267 manuscripts, 53,505 copies of rare books, 47,370 maps, 2,331 copies of rare books, 2,300 polonica, 1,254 parchments, 822 rare atlases, 679 doctor's theses, 459,229 museum objects, 293,580 etchings, 150,500 works of art, 142,814 drawings, 118,870 gold and silver coins, 12,972 museum deposits, 9,869 paintings, 5,589 pieces of graphic art, 5,238 sculptures, 3,545 medals, 4,500 valuable photographs, 1,000 book plates (Witek 2003: 8–9; Houpt 2007: 49).

In the preserved collection of documents related to the activities of Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit we can find information about the actions taken by the German occupation authorities in relation to the collections, which were located in eight regional offices: the Town Museum in Jarosław, the Museum of the Sądecka Land in Nowy Sącz, the Museum in Rabka, the Town Museum in Sanok, the Lemko Museum in Sanok, the Town Museum in Tarnów, the Diocesan Museum in Tarnów and the Museum of the Tatra Mountains in Zakopane. These materials, dating back to 1940–1942, indicate a different approach of the occupation authorities to the cultural goods gathered in the institutions mentioned above. Although there is no mention in the records of the purpose of this “keepers’ care” for these collections, we can assume that they were to enter the sphere of large-scale research, including anthropological, medical and ethnographic research, the results of which were to serve as guidelines for the conduct of ethnic policy in the occupied territories.

The documents are preserved in the form of reports on visits to individual museums; they were addressed to Abteilung Kultur und Unterricht beim Chef des Distrikts Krakau Gruppe Kunst, Museen und Sammlungen (Schooling Department of the Head of the Cracow District Group of Art, Museums and Collections, Museums Department). It was drawn up by the Viennese ethnologist Dr Anton Plügel, who, shortly afterwards, in April 1941, was employed by the Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit, who was responsible for museum matters at the above mentioned office. As one might think, when he took up this work, he included the surviving copies of the reports in the documentation of the Sektion Rassen- und Volkstumsforschung, as they were included in the archival material submitted to the Jagiellonian University by the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. They presented:

- the situation of museums during warfare – destruction of buildings, the fate of collections,

- information about museum employees and the characteristics of the collection,
- information on the necessary measures to restore these facilities to working order,
- proposals to create a new institution – a race and culture studies museum.

In a report on the visit to the Municipal Museum in Jarosław, conducted on June 5–6, 1940, among others, we can find the following entry: “(...) On May 24 and 25, 1940, the paintings and sculptures from the Dominican monastery were moved to the museum to be kept there, according to the instructions of the local German authorities; on May 31, the same was done with the paintings from the Franciscan monastery. The libraries of both monasteries were also handed over to the museum”.¹ the Museum’s collections have been characterized perfunctorily, but with a great deal of expertise:

Pictures, including several historical portraits of rather local importance, some fine prints – views of the city and its surroundings – several sculptures (bark, folklore works), old weapons, objects related to the history of guilds, old blacksmith’s ware, locksmith’s ware, mediaeval and early modern bricks and pieces of tiles, some prehistory and palaeology, coins and medals, harvest wreaths, Easter eggs from different areas. The collections were created without a plan from donations from various sources and from systematically imported individual items threatened with destruction.²

The report also noted that the management of the museum was entrusted to a former employee of the museum, Mgr Kazimierz Gotttfried. Subsequent parts of the report dealt with the situation of the museum’s premises. It was decided that the exhibition space should be enlarged by adapting the neighbouring building for museum purposes. Moreover, it was stated that the existing museum exhibition should be transformed in such a way that the main narrative theme is focused on the history of the city. Finally, the possibilities of enlarging the collection were also considered, with particular emphasis on folklore exhibits. This issue was discussed with the museum manager.³

¹ *Bericht über den im Auftrag von Herrn Hofrat Dr. Watzke durchgeführten Besuch im Museum in Jaroslau* (A Report from the Inspection in the Museum in Jarosław as Commissioned by the Councillor of the Court, Dr Watzke), Krakau, den 17. Juni 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 2 pp., A UJ, IDO SRV, Box 01/04/03.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The materials concerning the Museum of Sądecka Land in Nowy Sącz consist of three reports. The first one, prepared on June 20–22, 1940, presents the condition of the institution and its collections after the war. We read in it:

The museum is actually completely destroyed. For half a year it was deprived of any supervision and exposed to plundering and devastation. About a half of the resources have disappeared from the archives, especially very valuable and important documents concerning the German colonization. The collections of folklore and art, which used to be rich, as the photographs and stories of the former manager show, were stolen and very few objects have been preserved, in addition of little value.⁴

Further information is available on the assignment to the former custodians of the museum of the task of reclaiming the collections and on the first results of the activities undertaken.

The next document, dated July 5, 1940, is a record of the actions taken to establish the fate of the lost collections and the first results of the search.⁵

Finally, the report of September 23–24, 1940 notes: “Thanks to the efforts of two employees, who were entrusted with the task of finding the stolen property of the museum, it has so far been possible to bring back 300 exhibits, mainly everyday folk objects (furniture, household appliances, elements of folk costume) and folk sacred art”.⁶

The collection recovery action was considered an important stage in the works on the reconstruction of the museum in Nowy Sącz.

The report presenting the Museum in Rabka was prepared on June 23, 1940. It states that during the war the museum, located in an old wooden church not used for sacral purposes, survived without losses. It is recommended to build an ethnicity studies collection, at the same time pointing

⁴ *Bericht über den im Auftrag von Herrn Hofrat Dr. Watzke durchgeführten Besuch im Museum in Neu-Sandez* (A Report from the Inspection in the Museum in Nowy Sącz as Commissioned by the Councillor of the Court, Dr Watzke), Krakau, den 6. Juli 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 2 pp., A UJ, IDO SRV, Box 01/04/08.e.

⁵ *Bericht über Ermittlungen und Aussagen über die Vorgänge bei der Zerstörung des Museums in Neu-Sandez* (A Report on the Investigation and Clarification of Events Associated with the Destruction of the Museum in Nowy Sącz), Krakau, den 5. Juli 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 3 pp., A UJ, IDO SRV, Box 01/04/06.

⁶ *Bericht über den im Auftrag von Herrn Regierungsrat Schubert am 23. und 24.9.1940 ausgeführte Besichtigung des Museums* (A Report from the Inspection in the Museum as Commissioned by the State Councillor, Mr Schubert, on September 23 and 24, 1940), Krakau, den 29. September 1940. A. Plügel, Typed Manuscript, 2 pp., A UJ, IDO SRV, Box 01/04/09.

out that the condition of such activities is to find additional premises. Such a task was commissioned to the head of the museum.⁷

A report on the museums in Sanok, prepared between May 20 and June 3, 1940, notes that the Museum of the Lemko Region did not suffer any damage during the war. Its rich collection of 8,000 objects was located in the parish house. They are well-secured and well-organised. The collections of the Sanok Museum, consisting of 4,000 objects, were depleted (as a result of theft) by over 300 objects. These were mainly exhibits presenting textiles and folk costumes. Valuable objects, including the document of the founding of the town of Sanok and coin collections, were hidden by the museum staff. In the presented summary characteristics of the collections we can read:

Only agricultural equipment, ceramics and a weaving workshop remained from the ethnicity studies collections. Resources from the field of art history, apart from a few details, have been preserved undamaged. Gothic, Baroque, numerous folk products. A bit of Greek-Catholic sacred art, especially icons. Chasubles of both faiths. The archive – old legal acts, registers, etc. – is preserved with the exception of the most valuable stolen items, as is the ethnicity studies and museum library, portraits, fine prints, weapons, mostly of national and Polish significance, in large amounts.⁸

The following sections of the report deal with the guidelines for reorganising the two museums. It was proposed to create a joint exhibition presenting the culture of the Sanok region, in particular its folk culture. This exhibition was to be located in the exhibition halls of the Museum of Sanok Region, located in the Sanok castle. The plans to enlarge the collection of this common museum point to the collection of objects and photographs with a view to preparing a physiographical exhibition.

The information contained in the report on the visitation of Tarnów museums, conducted on June 10–11, 1940, indicates that the City Museum in Tarnów and the Diocesan Museum did not incur any losses during the hostilities. In the short characteristics of the collections we can read:

⁷ *Bericht über den im Auftrag von Herrn Regierungsrat Schubert durchgeführten Besuch im Museum in Rabka* (A Report from the Inspection in the Museum in Rabka as Commissioned by the State Councillor, Mr Schubert), Krakau, den 5. Juli 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 1 p., A UJ, IDO RSV, Box 01/04/07.

⁸ *Bericht über den im Auftrag von Herrn Hofrat Dr. Watzke durchgeführten Besuch im Museum in Sanok* (A Report from the Inspection in the Museum in Sanok as Commissioned by the Councillor of the Court, Dr Watzke), Krakau, den 17. Juni 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 3 pp., A UJ, IDO RSV, Box 01/04/04.

Municipal collections: relatively small, mostly exhibits concerning the history of the city, privileges, portraits, guild chests, mediaeval weapons. An important municipal archive. Diocesan Museum: sacred art and church equipment. A rich collection of Gothic paintings and sculptures in wood, also the Baroque is richly represented. Chasubles and church equipment. A bit of Greek-Catholic folk art. In addition, there are small items, palaeontological and prehistoric findings. An archive of old diocesan records. A good library in the field of art theory.⁹

In the further part of the report, guidelines are presented for leaving museum exhibitions in the Old Town Hall building. At the exhibitions, the collections of the City Museum are to be supplemented with exhibits from the Diocesan Museum. The direction of development of the collection was also indicated, in which documents concerning the history and development of Tarnów are to highlight the German participation in this process.

The report devoted to the Tatra Mountains Museum (Tatra-Museum) in Zakopane, sent to the Department of Culture and Education of the Cracow District on May 9, 1940, is by far the richest in terms of materials, but different from the reports presented above. This document is devoted to the critical analysis of the exhibition in the museum we are interested in and to the design of a new, permanent exhibition. At the beginning we read:

The exposition of the Tatra Mountains Museum in Zakopane should be described as outdated and insufficient. In its present form, the museum neither fulfils its function as a highlanders' "Museum of the Motherland", nor occupies a leading place in the cultural life of highlanders, nor can it show the German visitors the real features and values of the highlanders' nationality. At the same time, the Museum's current collections, some of them the archives of photographs, negatives and films, can be described as extremely valuable and rich.¹⁰

Then, in ten points, the defects of the exposition are presented in detail, concluding that in such a situation the only solution is to prepare a new permanent exhibition.

⁹ *Bericht über den im Auftrag von Herrn Hofrat Dr. Watzke durchgeführten Besuch im Museum in Tarnów* (A Report from the Inspection in the Museum in Tarnów as Commissioned by the Councillor of the Court, Dr Watzke), Krakau, den 17.Juni 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 3 pp., A UJ, ID0 RSV, Box 01/04/05.

¹⁰ *Planung für die Neuauftellung des Tatra-Museums in Zakopane* (A Plan of the New Exhibition at the Tatra Mountains Museum in Zakopane), 15. Mai 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 8 pp., A UJ, ID0 RSV, Box 01/04/02.

The presented concept of the new exhibition begins with guidelines concerning a different arrangement of the museum premises and their functions, the ideological tenets being presented in seven points and a general scenario, containing the following thematic sections: physiographical conditions, the world of plants and animals, prehistory, history, settlement, peasantry, construction, transport, handicraft and folk art, family and annual customs and ceremonies, beliefs, musical and oral folklore, language and racial types of the population.

Another document devoted to the museum industry in the Cracow district is not dated or initialled. It seems, however, that it dates back to the end of 1940, because one of the subchapters is entitled "Work done in the first administrative year". It contains information on the situation of the museum industry in Poland in the interwar period and after these institutions were taken over by the German civil administration. The report reads, among other things, as follows:

Apart from the individual "attempts to save the collections", the collections and museums of Cracow did not suffer any war damage, like most of the museums in the province. On the other hand, the Polish Museum in Sanok and the Regional Museum in Nowy Sącz were completely destroyed during and just after the war. The resources of the Sanok Museum have been destroyed by "saving", looting and, in part, senseless devastation by the irresponsible inhabitants of the area. In the first months after the war, the Nowy Sącz Museum was systematically plundered by the local population, especially by Jews.¹¹

The report mentions that the Cracow art collections have been subject to special scrutiny by the Secretary of State, Dr Mühlmann. It also noted that regional museums form a healthy basis for their functioning, while Cracow's collections are to be subject to scientific studies and preparatory work in connection with their necessary reorganisation from a German point of view.

A separate paragraph has been devoted to art schools – the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, the School of Artistic Crafts in Cracow and the Vocational School of Wood Industry in Zakopane. It was called for the Academy of Fine Arts to be closed down immediately because of its academic nature; the other two were to be converted into vocational schools.

In IDO documents we also find materials which can be considered a preliminary concept of creating a new museum institution. It is a racial-cultural

¹¹ *Museen und Sammlungen* (Museums and Collections). Typed manuscript, 2 pp. (undated, no author), A UJ IDO, Box 01/04/01.

museum, the exposition of which would be created from the collections of several institutions. It was also underlined that:

The plan of the museum does not coincide in any way with other museum plans, but rather is a deliberate complement to them, thus creating a truly complete picture of the situation. The resources of the Archaeological and Physiographical Museum of the Academy of Sciences, the Anthropological Museum of the University and individual medical and natural institutes, as well as the ethnicity museum, if necessary, can be used to create the most modern museum in the entire Reich.¹²

The scenario of the exhibition was to present the following issues: history of the beginnings of man, with a particular emphasis on the lines leading to anthropoids, human-humanoid ape kinship relations, human physiography and organology in terms of systematic anthropology, comparative anatomy of human races, basics of genetics on examples of plants and animals, the inheritance of physical and emotional characteristics by man, demographic policy and racial hygiene, early forms of historical and contemporary human race coverage, the race studies of the German Reich, comparative race studies of the German Reich and the Generalgouvernement, the demographic policy and the eugenics of the German Reich. Short comments on particular issues do not hide the mission of the exhibition prepared in such a way as to prove the racial inferiority of the population of countries conquered by the Third Reich. We read, among other things:

By comparison, the racial inferiority of the population of the Generalgouvernement can be demonstrated and its inability to shape its own destiny can be deduced from this. Emphasizing the share of primitive and East Asian population in the total population of the Generalgouvernement. (...) Demonstrating again the significant inferiority of Poles towards the Reich and presenting the conclusions drawn from it.¹³

It is also proposed to supplement the permanent exhibition with temporary exhibitions of a similar scope. The latter was considered to be feasible in the short term. Their titles were also mentioned: Jewry in the East of

¹² A document without a heading, concerning the creation of a new institution from the former Polish Academy of Skills and several institutes of the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, dated October 15, 1940. A. Plügel, Typed manuscript, 5 pp., A UJ IDO, Box 01/04/10.

¹³ Ibid.

Europe, especially in the Generalgouvernement, the racial image of German settlement in the Generalgouvernement.

The outline of the characteristics of the materials concerning museology contained in the IDO's archival collection requires at least a brief commentary. Leaving aside the entire context of historical facts, it can be concluded that most of the initial activities of the German administration in relation to the collections of the museums mentioned in this study have had a positive effect from the point of view of their protection. Also the concern to provide care to the collections, their further development and the concepts of new organisational and exhibition solutions would be difficult to interpret as contradictory to the binding interpretations of the theory of museology. Some documents are so deeply rooted in the characteristics of the collections and exhibition concepts that it seems highly probable that Polish employees will benefit from the reorganisation and modernisation plans prepared earlier by them. This situation occurred in the Zakopane Museum, which is confirmed by Juliusz Zborowski's report addressed to the Board of the Union of Museums in Poland after the war. We read in it:

In fact, the Abteilung was only interested in whether there were German subtitles in the exhibition halls. It was only in 1942 that one of the institution's prehistoric officials, who understood museology and treated the so-called "Góralenfrage" (!) as a nonsense, showed interest in the collection. Having read carefully the pre-war plans for the development of the Museum and the arrangement of the exhibition halls, he accepted them without changes (Jost 2001: 259).

We do not find in the reports any critical comments about the current guardians of the collections or the museum's personnel. Some of them were still employed, although the management of the institutions was usually entrusted to Germans or people of German origin. The project of a new museum of race and culture studies, on the other hand, had already clearly an ideological character – demonstrating the superiority of the German race and culture over the races and cultures of the conquered nations.